An Essay

ON

The Physician and his Profession.

Respectfully submitted to the Faculty
of the

Homœopathic Medical College

of

PENNSYLVANIA

For the Degree of Doctor of Medicine,

by

G. L. Gifford.

Of

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To the Faculty.

Gentlemen;

In presenting this brief essay to you for your inspection, I do it feeling that I have not done justice to the subject I have chosen. I am well aware that the subject is worthy of a better pen than mine, and I would therefore ask you to overlook its many imperfections. It is a subject upon which I love to dwell; and, though I feel that I am ill prepared to assume the heavy responsibilities devolving upon the physician, I trust that time and perse-

verence will enable me to over-
come all obstacles and become
equal to the task.

I have long looked forward
to the time when I should
take my place in the ranks
of the Medical profession and
perform my share of the du-
ties and bear my share of
the responsibilities connected
with it; and if you shall consider
me competent to enter the
ranks of this noble profession
I shall be but too happy to
reciere the honor at your

hands, Begging your pardon
for the intrusion, allow me
to remain your Obt Servt.

G. L. Gifford.

The Physician and his Profession.

As we toil wearily on through life's journey, we are continually assuming new cares and responsibilities; a single glance at the brow of the Lawyer reveals to us whole volumes of perplexities and troubles. His face is the unmistakeable index of the deep and troubled workings of the brain within, It needs but one grasp of the broad and hardened palm of the honest farmer to convince you that by the

sweat of his brow does he earn his bread. Look at the merchant with his pale and anxious countenance as he emerges late at night from the counting house; it needs no words to inform you that he too has cares and responsibilities which weigh heavily on his mind.

Indeed, there is no trade or profession that is not beset with innumerable cares perplexities and responsibilities.

Yes! the great wheel of time is slowly but surely revolving

on its axis and the great tide of humanity with sure and solemn tread must march along in unity with it, and never may we lay our cares and perplexities aside and say our work is finished until our Father in Heaven in his infinite wisdom and goodness sees fit to call us from this world of care and trouble to a brighter and happier home in Heaven.

But amid all the responsibilities of life, the various —

trades and professions, no calling has an object more noble than does the profession of medicine, nor are the responsibilities of any trade or profession greater than are those which are connected with the profession of medicine.

It is indeed a noble profession, and well worthy a lifetime of unceasing toil and devotion. It is a profession which not only presents a vast field for labor, but one which requires

constant application and untiring efforts on the part of the practitioner; and it is his duty to prepare himself for its high offices; and, though he should be subjected to many trials and difficulties, if he pursues his calling with earnestness and truth, he will not only overcome all difficulties that lie in his way, but he will strengthen his confidence in himself and his profession, and pave the way to an honourable competence. Moreover his

trials and difficulties will exert over him a salutary influence in the way of mental and moral discipline and give him a new stimulus to increase his efforts.

He who would enter the ranks of the medical profession should consider well; first: his own object; and the object of the calling in which he wishes to embark, before he makes his final decission. His own object, and the nature of

that object he alone is best able to decide; but the object of the profession he contemplates engaging in, is of vital importance to his present as well as future welfare.

In this money-making age, when everyone is seeking for an opportunity to acquire a fortune, we observe all sorts and classes of men actively engaged in their favourite pursuit; that of making money. The farmer's mechanic's merchant's lawyer's, broker's

bankers, and the thousand and one other trades and professions have their devotees and are pursued with earnestness and vigor; and in the general bustle and confusion of life everything is overlooked but the one great object; that of making money; and he who looks to the profession of medicine as the profession in which to make his fortune [merely] will soon make the mortifying discovery that he has mistaken his calling.

The profession of medicine is the last profession he must look to for the attainment of such an object.

Who can estimate the amount of good which the profession of medicine is capable of doing? Knowledge may enlighten the mind; riches may feed and clothe the body and religion may comfort the poor and humble, but it belongs to the province of medicine to relieve the sufferings of the dying and to

restore the body and mind to a state of health and enjoyment.

The profession of medicine has indeed a high and holy mission for its object. The saving of human life is as sacred and God like a mission as man can devote himself to, and one which develops in him the noblest and most generous feelings with which he is endowed. And that profession which restores the sick and sorrow-

ing to health and happiness restores a parent to his children, or a child to its parents and snatches a brother or sister from the very jaws of death is indeed a sacred and holy profession.

He who would enter the ranks of the medical profession should (again) consider the fearful responsibilities which are connected with it, and which he will be called upon to assume.

Amid the various trades

and professions there are many sore and trying responsibilities to be encountered. The lawyer, the merchant, the mechanic, the millionaire and even the little beggar in the street, all have their trials and responsibilities, but they seldom if ever reach beyond the consideration of dollars and cents. On the contrary the responsibilities incident to and necessarily connected with the practice of medicine are of vital

importance. To the physician is entrusted, not the money or lands, but the health, the happiness, aye the very lives of his suffering fellow-beings, (and surely this is a matter of no light or trifling importance), and it is his imperative duty to see that he is competent to assume so great a responsibility.

The relation the physician bears to his patient is one well calculated to call forth

his warmest sympathies, and it is only on those occasions when he is called upon to stand by the bedside of the dying that he realizes the magnitude of his responsibilities

*"The mental and moral influence he is capable of exercising under such momentous

*This and the following quotation are taken from a valedictory delivered in New York by Prof. Beakly. The truth of the remarks contained in them noone can for

occasions,
ous ~~circumstances~~, has a great
and all-absorbing import
and carries with it a pow-
er more potent than has
been ordinarily attributed
to it."

"The general bearing of the
physician in the presence
of the sick — his conversa-

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a moment doubt. My motive
in making use of them is not
for the want of material, but
because they are applicable to my
subject and better express
what I would say myself — E.

tion either with the invalid or friends, his expression of countenance, all are scrutinized and interpreted with an accuracy that conveys impressions either of a beneficial or disastrous nature, In proportion then as he estimates these influences in their intellectual and moral agencies and the facility in their adaptation to the idiosyncrasies of those he is brought in contact with, will he have

the gratification of recog-
nizing the healthful and
all-controlling power."

Consider, again, the many
trials and hardships the
physician is called upon to
endure, and the sad and
sickening scenes he witness-
es.

The trials of the physi-
cian are numerous enough
in times of general health,
but when pestilence spreads
terror and desolation on
the earth, his trials are

fearfully augmented; then
must he be found at his
post of duty; others will
flee from the dread de-
stroyer, but he must re-
main firm. The physician
who deserts his post at
such an hour dooms the
stricken sufferer to all
the horrors of a speedy
and certain death without
a ray of hope or a shadow
of assistance, forfeits his
right to the very name
of physician and brings

a lasting disgrace upon himself and his profession.

He will be called upon to sit by the bedside of the sick and dying, "and witness the triumphs of the great enemy of man- "grim-visaged death." At such times it becomes this sad and painful duty to apprize the patient of the near approach of the enemy that he cannot live - he must die. It is indeed a sad and solemn duty.

"The physician while attending under such painful and afflicting circumstances, has it within his power" (and he should exert himself as far as he is able) "to disabuse the dying of those imaginary and unphilosophical impressions that haunt, and disturb the minds of the superstitious, who believe the act of death to be accompanied with physical agony."

"What more sublime and

touching than the transition of the soul from one state of being to another." "What more wonderful and mysterious than the passage of the disembodied spirit through the Valley and shadow of death? Who can contemplate the passage of the soul to that bourne from which no traveller returns – that it has gone to meet its God, without realizing that upon the head of the physician there rests a

great responsibility?.

If he who would enter the ranks of the Medical profession has seriously and carefully considered these points and is both ready and willing to enter upon a life of devoted and self-sacrificing industry for the relief of suffering humanity; if he has considered his own interests as secondary to those of his patients, and considers the welfare of his suffering

fellow-beings as the highest and noblest ambition to which he aspires, and if he is still resolved to take the important step, he may safely and boldly enter the ranks of this noble and philanthropic calling; and he will become an ornament to society and an honor to his profession.

In no pursuit are the rewards of a life of toil and sacrifice longer

delayed than in this, and in none when they do come, are they more richly deserved. Alas! how many, while the more eminent and deserving have been struggling painfully on on their road to fame; have either engaged in other pursuits, or, worn out with the delusive expectations of a final but long-delayed reward, have led a life of unsatisfied aspirations, and perhaps ended

their lives by filling a poor and friendless grave? It is beyond our power to determine

The reputation of eminent and deserving practitioners has too often been allowed to fill the space in the eye of the beginner, and he has too often persuaded himself that in commencing the practise of medicine he was opening the portals to fame and wealth; that

almost without the seeking a fortune would be amassed. The expectations of such are never realized. Their motives are of too sordid a nature. They may devote themselves with never so much zeal and ambition to the attainment of their object, but they will fail in the realization of their expectations; they will sink beneath the notice of the profession, and in the obscurity which disappointed

ambition generally seeks for itself, will live unnoticed and die unlamented.

No! We must never look to the profession of medicine if the attainment of riches is the only object we have in view; If mammon is the God we worship if riches is the first and greatest object to which our aim is directed, we certainly have mistaken our calling and the sooner we abandon it, the sooner

will we avoid the disgrace not only of degrading ourselves, but of bringing disgrace upon our profession.

Of course none of us look upon riches as a thing to be despised, Our profession is probably to most of us our means of obtaining a livelihood, and if we devote ourselves to it as we ought we shall never want for a recompense for our toils, and in proportion as we make our ex-

ertions and sacrifices, in just that proportion shall we be remunerated.

As we go forth from our Alma Mater we are not to go prepared to witness scenes of gayety and revelry, or to participate in the many pleasures and allurements which the world affords. But we must go prepared to witness sad scenes of human sickness and suffering with which our

vocation is familiar: scenes
well calculated to call forth
our warmest sympathies,
and it well becomes us to
be possessed of charitable
and sympathizing natures.

We shall be called upon
to combat the dread destroy-
er in a thousand different
forms, and though we can
not always be made aware
of its approaches, yet, we are
to be constantly on the
alert, ever ready for its ap-
proaches, whether sudden

slow and open, or secret, and disguised,

The responsibilities with which we shall be intrusted, are of no ordinary character. The happiness or the wretchedness of many families will probably rest in our hands, and it will depend upon the preparation we have made whether we shall be able to render them happy, or through ignorance be compelled to leave them

wretched. Let us, therefore go prepared for any and every emergency! Let us not dare to embark in a calling like this without adequate and earnest preparation! Let us beware how we neglect or abuse a calling so precious and important. In times of health or sickness let us be equally devoted. Through storm or sunshine day or night let us be ever ready and willing to re-

spond to the call of the sick and dying. If pestilence invades the land let us ever be found at our post; then it is that duty demands our greatest sacrifices.

With an eye to the common good of our afflicted fellow-beings; let us toil on ever ready to render aid and comfort to the afflicted of every sect and rank and country and religion;

Finally; if we are true

and faithful in the performance of our duties and are actuated by pure and holy motives, never shall we have cause to regret the day we adopted the profession of medicine.